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THE

# EXECUTION OF JOHN BROWN;

## A DISCOURSE,

Delivered at Chicago, December 4th, 1859,

IN THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

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BY REV. W. W. PATTON.

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## THE EXECUTION OF JOHN BROWN.

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*John 12: 25.*—"Verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."

By the use of a striking analogy, Jesus draws attention to the fact, that a man's death may be productive of the most beneficial results to the cause with which he is identified—nay, not only so, but that the power of a man's death may reduce his previous life to a mere cypher. A grain of wheat, "abiding alone," though for never so many years, of what value is it? There is no coin small enough to buy it. It is too diminutive to avail for food. No storage in the granary will increase the bulk. In its present form it is in fact perfectly useless. But let it come under sentence of death, to be cast forth as a vile and despicable thing; at the proper season, make a grave for it in the earth, and hide it out of sight in the damp ground; there let it lie neglected, till it bursts asunder and is seemingly destroyed; and what have you done? Reduced it to nothing, or to the mere dust of decay? Nay, verily. You have made it a thing of power. You have multiplied it fifty fold. From its bursting heart issues a tender shoot that seeks the air and sun, and that crowns itself at last with the bearded head that teems with grain. And

were that head of wheat dealt with in like manner, the process would need to be repeated but a few times, to spread before the gladdened eye a glorious harvest field, from which the toiling farmer would draw his wealth and hungering thousands their bread.

And so Christ would have us understand, that a man who dies for the truth, who yields himself as a sacrifice for a righteous cause, is so far from perishing thereby out of all influence, that he actually multiplies his power a thousand fold; that, paradoxical as the assertion may be, he then only begins to live. He offered himself as the chief illustration of the truth; for he prefaced the declaration with the words, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." And lest any of his disciples should mistake his meaning, nor once associate the idea of "glory" with an ignominious execution as a malefactor, he added the text to show how death might operate to set upon a man the seal of honor and power. It is quite needless, when eighteen centuries have accumulated the evidence, for me to point out the verification of Christ's predictive remark concerning himself. If proof were desired, it would be sufficient to take the word *cross*, once the synonym



of shame and now that of glory, once the representative of weakness even unto death, but now the symbol of power and of endless life; and the change owing simply to the fact that on the cross the murdered Jesus breathed his last breath! Satan was fool enough to suppose that a grain of wheat perished when it was planted! He thought he had secured the world's ruin when he had crucified its Redeemer, and behold he had unwittingly accomplished its salvation!

But let it not be imagined that Christ meant to restrict the application of the text to himself, because he was the highest illustration of the truth which it expressed, or because his death sustained a peculiar relation to the world. Not only is the language general and as it were proverbial, but in the following verse he expressly leads each reader to make a personal application of it, that we too may exercise its sublime faith and prepare, if Providence require, for the necessary sacrifice; saying, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal." No man can tell in what circumstances he may be placed in relation to the cause of truth, or when he may be called to choose between death and cowardice; between the sacrifice of his own life and treason to God and humanity. As in every such case, a false expediency would fain persuade us that it were folly and insanity to court death and thus to lose forever all opportunity to promote the cause we love, Christ hastens to reassure our moral courage and sound judgment, by declaring that death in such circumstances is the highest testimony we can bear to the truth, and that the grave when it closes over our lifeless remains, shall be but as the furrow when it has embosomed the seed.

Under the Old Dispensation, when principles clothed themselves in rude forms, and God suffered men to be taught divine

truths by harsh methods, such as were then necessary from the world's lack of mental and moral culture, Samson was the striking exemplification of this idea. He was a rough, uncouth, physical type of the grand thought that death may crown the deeds of life with a still vaster result. He was God's scourge of the Philistines, and under his stalwart arm many an uncircumcised oppressor of God's people bit the dust. But at last, and by his own folly too, they had him in prison; they put out his eyes; they bound his feet with fetters of brass, and his power seemed to have departed forever. "The lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god and to rejoice; for they said, 'Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand.' And when the people saw him, they praised their god; for they said, 'Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy and the destroyer of our country, who slew many of us.'" The grand temple of Dagon was filled with three thousand men and women assembled to exult over Samson, when with a prayer to God for aid, the captive hero seized the main columns which supported the building and bowed forward "with all his might. The support gave way, the massive edifice fell with a crash upon the mocking oppressors, and the inspired penman records this significant sentence:—"So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life." Madman! fanatic! suicide! shout the pale conservatives, as they contemplate the scene; but the author of the epistle to the Hebrews places the name of Samson on the list of the worthies who "obtained a good report through faith," and, "who, through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turn-

ed to flight the armies of the aliens."— That was the most impressive mode of instruction in that barbaric age, and perhaps it were not too much to say, that even now, when men by their vices, cherish the barbaric spirit, and when nations in their crimes show that the mild influence of Christianity has not civilized them, God will insert in their history a chapter out of the Old Testament, and will raise up a Samson to be their instructor in morals.

When a few more centuries had rolled by, the illustrations of the truth which we are considering assumed the form of martyrdoms. Prophets were slain by incensed kings for their faithful political preaching, and bequeathed their memories and principles as a rich legacy to the nation and the world. Then, as introductory to the Savior, came John the Baptist, with his brief but powerful ministry, which (by consulting worldly prudence and preserving the favor of Herod, which was at first accorded to him) he might have prolonged, at least in its outward form to old age. But he was a ripe seed to be best used by being planted; and so, with full faith in the doctrine of the text, he persisted in "ruining his influence" by rebuking the crimes of the king, and met a violent death, and God immortalized his example by giving it a place in the Bible, where it has been a power in moulding the characters of millions for eighteen centuries. Next came the illustrious victory of the cross, in which Christ verified his own declaration that death sows the seed of a measureless harvest, and then follows the long procession of Christian martyrs, from Stephen to our own times, the result of whose sufferings and deaths has been so uniform as to give rise to the familiar proverb, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." And the principle has held true even beyond its strictly religious illustrations, history teach-

ing us that the victims who perish in the first stages of resistance to any form of wrong and outrage in the world, do not die in vain, nor is their influence diminished but rather increased by their heroic sacrifice. The sword and the axe have often proved to be the ploughshares that turned the furrow in which the madness of oppressors unwittingly planted the seed of subsequent revolutions, which under the sunshine of a favoring Providence, ripened into human deliverance.

And now let us inquire by what methods death becomes even more fruitful than life. Principally by two:

1. It compels attention to the grand point at issue. Death is too solemn an event to pass without notice, even in its ordinary private occurrence. But when it comes publicly, by order of the rulers, or in the violent rage of the people, it arrests universal attention. The inquiry is heard from every lip, Why is this? What has the man done? How did he forfeit his life? Then ensue statement and counter statement, accusation and defence, argument and appeal. At first those who suffer for the truth will be overwhelmed with obloquy; for they belong to the apparently insignificant minority, against whom is an almost universal outcry. But, under God's blessing, truth will gradually clear itself from the mists of prejudice and passion. That men should be found willing to die for their principles, argues at least honesty and heroism on their part, and an electrifying power in their peculiar belief. The object for which they shed their blood must seem to them to be noble and unspeakably important; may it not really be that they are contending for a sublime truth, or exposing a deadly error, or resisting an insufferable outrage? Such suspicions, leading to investigation, soon ripen into conviction in intelligent and thoughtful minds, and spread thence to others under their



influence, till a general change of opinion is secured. Thus, the mere fact of martyrdom occasions inquiry and discussion such as no amount of ordinary conversation or preaching would secure.

2. But perhaps a still more potent influence is, the direct contagion of the spirit and example of the martyrs. The heart naturally responds to deeds of heroism. We admire bravery even in a bad cause; we are touched with sympathy and respect for fortitude even where it is sustained by fanaticism. Hence all experience proves, that there is no surer way to propagate error and delusion than to persecute its advocates. These may gain through sympathy for their sufferings what they would fail to secure by their arguments. If then, men die for the truth; if in their last moments they give utterance to sentiments which, piercing through the outward armor of law and custom, appeal directly to the conscience; if they manifest a spirit of faith in God and love to man, and show that they act from no selfish considerations, but from high moral principle; if their dying declarations elicit a response from the noblest instincts of the human breast; there will be a contagion in their character and deeds which no power on earth or in hell can nullify. Their very looks and tones will beget conviction among the spectators; their lofty bearing and spirit of self-sacrifice will pass, as by inspiration, into the noble natures among those who witness their death; their last utterances will be caught up with reverent devotion, carried as on the wings of the wind to the most distant places, and adopted as the watch-words of future generations; and their graves will be as the altars of religion, to which men will come to put themselves and their children under oaths of eternal hatred to falsehood and crime. This, it is well known, was the effect of the heathen persecutions directed

against the early Christians. Such was the faith, purity, meekness and fortitude of the sufferers, that converts multiplied at every martyrdom, and ere long, death so lost its accustomed terror, and the scaffold and stake become so ennobled by the precious blood which had stained them, that new disciples avowed themselves amid the multitude in the very courts and at the place of execution, and vied with each other in claiming the martyr's fate and crown. Thus was death more fruitful than life.

I need not dwell longer upon the general principle announced in our text. You have already anticipated the application which the events of the past week would suggest, and to which I would now direct attention, only premising, that such are the relations of the question which they raise, that it becomes us both as citizens and as christians to consider carefully the positions which we may assume.

On Friday, the second of December, in this the year of our Lord, eighteen hundred and fifty-nine, at Charlestown, in the State of Virginia, John Brown was publicly executed on the gallows, by the authorities of that State. No execution has ever excited so much interest in this country, or given rise to such conflicting opinions. There is no dispute as to what John Brown actually did; there is a wide difference of judgment as to the moral character of his conduct. That we may reach a calm and considerate conclusion, let us notice separately the man and his deeds; and the latter first.

John Brown was executed for alleged treason against the State of Virginia, for endeavoring to excite an insurrection among the slaves, and for murder. As the charge of murder was not based on anything that usually bears that name, but on acts more nearly parallel to deaths caused in war, and as the killing was incidental to the prosecution of his other plans and



occurred while defending himself therein, we need not dwell upon it separately.—The charge of treason would seem necessarily to apply only to a citizen of the State who had sought to overthrow the government, and as John Brown never was a citizen of Virginia nor even a resident, as he denied any intention of overthrowing the government, and as no proof of the fact was adduced on the trial, we may dismiss that charge also.

The real ground of offence, which has excited the anger of the South, while it has elicited the sympathy of the North, has been his attempt to secure freedom for the slaves. Doubt has existed as to the precise nature of his plans in this respect; whether he simply intended to effect a forcible rescue of a certain number, carrying off to Canada an armed body of fugitives from Virginia, as he did a year since from Missouri, which is his own dying and most credible explanation of his designs; or whether he hoped to excite insurrection, with vague hopes that from a local rebellion it might spread through all the slave States and, perhaps, without overthrowing the government, extort an act of emancipation.

Let the following extract from his speech in court speak for itself:

"I have, may it please the Court, a few words to say. In the first place, I deny everything but what I have all along admitted, the design on my part to free the slaves. I intended certainly to have made a clean thing of that matter, as I did last winter when I went into Missouri, and there took the slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, moving them through the country, and finally left them in Canada. I designed to have done the same thing again on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend to commit murder, nor treason, nor to excite or incite the slaves to rebellion and to make an insurrection."

At all events, he made an armed nocturnal attack upon the place known as Harper's Ferry, seized the United States ar-

senal, made sundry prisoners, was surrounded by troops, defended himself by force of arms, occasioning several deaths on both sides, including that of two of his own sons and was finally wounded, overpowered by numbers, seized, imprisoned, tried with a haste and prejudice which mocked alike the spirit and the form of justice, convicted, sentenced and executed. What opinion shall we express as Christians, upon this matter? What shall I say as a minister of the Lord Jesus?

That we should have sympathy with John Brown in the general object of securing freedom to the slaves, follows not merely from our christianity but from our very manhood. He has sunk below the level of our common humanity whose heart does not respond to the appeal of the slave as against his master and the laws by which his master holds him in bondage. It needs no revelation to assure us, that as there is an eternal distinction between a *person* and a *thing*, so the chattel principle, which affirms human beings to be property, is only and always a lie. But it does not follow from this, that all means may be used indiscriminately for the overthrow of the system which recognizes and enforces this lie, or for the rescue of individual sufferers. The apostle hath warned us against the rule, "Let us do evil that good may come," as a damnable heresy. Let me therefore carefully state what I suppose to be the truth on this point according to sound reason and the word of God.

The Bible, aside from its code of laws for the Jews, under the old dispensation, does not legislate directly for civil communities as such. It simply indicates those general principles of justice and humanity which they are bound to recognize under pain of divine displeasure. Therefore it does not inculcate political truth as regards the best form of government, nor instruct communities as to the right,

duty and time of a revolution, where government has become a mere tyranny and defeats its divinely appointed end. It addresses individual men in their personal relations to government, and enjoins obedience to all righteous law, and patient submission to unjust enactments, until such time as deliverance may come; which may be by a peaceable change of rulers or by a successful revolution on the part of the people as a body. No sanction is given to mere individual outbreaks, whether from revenge, despair, or a desire of redress; because such outbreaks, encourage evil passions, lead to rash enterprises, bring ruin on all concerned with them, cover religion with the reproach of being an exciter of sedition and an enemy of good order, and produce in every way more evil than they remedy.

Now apply these principles to the subject of slavery and the way of duty is made plain. As has been often said, slavery is nothing more nor less than a state of war perpetuated between masters and slaves. It originated in war, when the prisoners taken in battle or the captives seized in conquered cities were reduced to slavery. The African slave trade has always been supplied with victims by incessant wars between the tribes; the prisoners being regularly enslaved and then retained in the country or sold to the traders. Slavery is thus perpetuated captivity, as when a few years since, the Algerines reduced their white captives to slavery. The slaves have therefore a perfect right to do what other captives have a right to do; what any oppressed nation has a right to do. They may resort, in a body, to revolution, if peaceable measures are in vain, and if they have any reasonable prospect of success; that is, provided they can act unitedly with sufficient intelligence and courage, and with adequate resources of attack, defence and subsistence. This will not be denied by any who defend the

course of our own fathers, or who believe in the right of revolution *on the part of communities*. If they were to do this, I see not but that it would be as proper for others to go to their aid, as it was for Lafayette to come from France to assist our struggling fathers. Yea, more may be true. If it were previously *certain* that they had sufficient resources and were prepared to rise and successfully take and defend their rights, provided a leader could be secured from abroad, or a small body of effective auxiliaries could aid them at the first and most perilous moment, it would be difficult to prove wrong upon those who should supply this single deficiency. Indeed if it was right for the civilized world to interfere by force of arms to put an end to the oppression practiced in the Barbary States, or if French intervention would be right in the Papal States, it would not be easy to show that there would be wrong in the forcible release of the slaves in the United States by civilized nations that should have the power. But where no such prospect of success exists, mere individual enterprises, or small combinations for violent resistance, are inexpedient and wrong, being condemned by sound reason and by the explicit teaching of the Scriptures. Those who in such case "take the sword" must, as our Lord warned Peter in similar circumstances, expect to "perish by the sword."

If the slave cannot effect a quiet and peaceable escape, as Paul, with the assistance of the disciples, did from Damascus, he must submit patiently to the wrong, must be industrious, honest and meek, must endeavor to conciliate the favor and promote the good of the master, and must thus recommend the religion of Jesus and lighten as far as possible the burdens of himself and fellows. This was the uniform advice and command of the apostles, opposed though they were to slavery.— See Ep. 6: 5-8, Colos. 3: 22-25. 1. Tim.



6: 1-5, 1. Pet. 2: 18-20. And those from without who sympathize with the slave, must be governed by the same principle, abstaining from violence, and resorting to moral and religious means; prayer, preaching, printing and the ballot box. The spirit of benevolence to all concerned requires this course.

Judged by these obvious rules, the expedition of John Brown into the State of Virginia cannot be justified, whether it were for insurrection, or for the forcible abduction of slaves. Not that slavery is right, or slave law at all valid, or a slaveholding government, *so far forth*, anything more than organized piracy; but only that the tendency of such enterprises is to beget universal bitterness of feeling, to add to the sufferings of the slaves, to create new obstacles in the way of those who are seeking their peaceful emancipation, to cause the useless death of many individuals and to end in disastrous failure.

The slaves of our land, however much more oppressed than our fathers, have not their means of successful revolution, nor even those which were enjoyed by their own kindred in St. Domingo. They are vastly outnumbered by the white population, are without arms, are undisciplined, ignorant, without mutual understanding, destitute of money or resources of any kind, and unfit, therefore, for revolutionary enterprises, except to co-operate with a powerful invading army. Indeed the best indication of good sense which they have ever given, was in their refusing to unite in John Brown's rash undertaking. It were well if their prudence could be imitated by those who sympathize with them. Gordian knots are not always to be cut by the sword. No one has a right to sacrifice himself or others in mad enterprises.

And then it must be remembered, that though thus powerless for good, an insur-

rection of the slaves would be mighty for evil. They could not indeed conquer the whites in war, but must ultimately, without powerful help from abroad, be slaughtered by thousands, and they would be unable to establish and maintain a government of their own; but then they could at first rob and burn, destroy and murder; they could easily let loose the passions of hell, and like so many black fiends outrage and massacre helpless women and children; they could desolate the face of the country; they could maintain a long, desultory strife from out of forests and swamps and mountains; and thus they could bring ruin upon the South, and commit atrocities at the very thought of which our blood runs cold. And can we take any delight in such a prospect? Does it offer any hope to humanity, and promise a blessing to the world superior to that which could be secured by peaceful and religious means? Were it not infinitely better to secure national repentance, and the consent of all sections and classes to emancipation? I cannot sympathize, then, with any project which looks to a servile insurrection. It would not benefit the slave, and it would be a hell on earth to the whites. It is not the way of Christianity, but of blind passion and diabolical revenge.

John Brown's expedition, therefore, if it was tainted with such a design, (which he denies and I think truthfully,) or if it legitimately tended in that direction, is only to be condemned. We have not yet exhausted peaceful measures; indeed, (I say it to our shame,) we have scarcely begun to use them. No door was open, promising to a sober judgment success in revolutionary attempts; for the requisite resources were not available from within or from without. The direct result has been death to John Brown and to not a few others, both among his associates and his opponents, and the stirring of fiery

passion in all sections of the land, the possible prelude to a terrible fratricidal conflict, while not a slave has been set at liberty.

So much for the *enterprise*, and now for the *man*! Men must not always be judged by their enterprises; because these latter may be either better or worse than their authors. Bad men may engage in noble achievements, and good men may become so deluded as to embark in rash, foolish and even wicked undertakings; especially when they are moved by deep sympathy with human suffering, or by strong indignation at heinous crime. There is such a thing as hallucination in enthusiastic minds which dwell exclusively upon a single exciting topic. While we condemn therefore as a matter of judgment, the expedition in which John Brown came to his end, we may still find reason not only to sympathize with his desire to overthrow slavery, but also to acquit the man of evil intent and even to admire him as in spirit one of the few heroes of history. There are many things to be taken into account in estimating the part which John Brown took in this sad matter.

First of all, we are to remember his native character. Enough has already come to light to show that from a boy, John Brown was marked by a peculiar nobility of character. The sternest integrity, the highest sense of justice and honor, the most tender and womanly compassion, and yet the coolest daring and the most unflinching fortitude—these were his well known qualities. And they not only fitted him for perilous enterprises, but naturally suggested them in the cause of humanity. A certain class of errors imply nobility of character. A mean, selfish man would never have embarked in such an undertaking. It was the impulsive, generous-hearted Peter that drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. And if he had cut off his head, would the

act have been murder? Yet religious editors have called John Brown a murderer!

Next we must call to mind what American slavery is, in all its vileness and in all its audacity, and what must have been the feelings of such a man as John Brown, when he had meditated upon its outrages for years, had seen its power increasing, had long identified himself with the nearly four millions of its victims, and in view of the apathy of the church and the greed of the slaveholders, had come to despair of its peaceful termination. Said Edmund Burke, in one of his noted speeches, when apologizing for any undue warmth of expression, "Something must be pardoned to the spirit of liberty." We can afford to be lenient towards extreme action against American slavery, when we remember that John Wesley pronounced it to be "the vilest beneath the sun," and when we think how at times its atrocities have made our own blood boil in our veins, and it seemed as though we must arm at once and rush to the relief of the oppressed.

And to this again we must add the peculiar experience and training which John Brown had in Kansas, and for which he was indebted to the slaveholding States and the Federal Government. It was in Kansas that he learned to use arms against slavery, and those arms were taken up in defence of the friends of freedom against the lawless and unprovoked violence of the slaveholders who invaded the territory from the neighboring State of Missouri in armed bands, seized upon the ballot boxes, imposed a fraudulent legislature and a tyrannical code of laws, and determined to force slavery upon that fair domain contrary to the will of the people. When driven to resistance by the robberies, arsons and murders of the slaveholders, his own son having been cruelly slain by them, and when under his lead the war had been successfully turned against those



who commenced it, is it singular that John Brown should have judged that as the slaveholders had appealed to arms, he might justly try them hereafter at their chosen tribunal and press them with their own weapons? If his attention was turned in the wrong direction, in the choice of means wherewith to combat slavery, who were his teachers and who is responsible for his progress in the school of arms?

Nor must we forget, in this connection, the stimulus that such a conception would receive from the numerous "filibuster expeditions and slave-trade ventures of the South. If public meetings could be held and newspapers printed, to advocate piracy in two different forms, though both in the interest of slavery, and the State and Federal governments connive at the same, does it manifest a remarkable deterioration of morals, that John Brown came to the conclusion that what could be done for slavery might equally be done for freedom? that on the homœopathic principle that "like cures like," those who favored filibuster expeditions to Cuba and Central America, might be cured by a similar expedition to "extend the area of freedom" in Virginia? Yes, in Virginia, of all other States, the home of Henry and Washington and Jefferson—the State that has for its broad seal the representation of a freeman trampling on the prostrate body of an oppressor, with the motto above, "*Sic semper tyrannis!*"—"Thus may it always be to tyrants!"

And from whom but from slaveholders did John Brown obtain the suggestion of the leading feature of his enterprise? Did not the Missourians, on their way to invade Kansas, break open the public arsenal and supply themselves with weapons? Did not Governor Wise himself, under whose administration John Brown has just been hung, declare in 1856, during the last presidential canvass, that if John C. Fremont were elected President, the South would

immediately seize the United States arsenal at Harper's Ferry and not allow it to remain in the possession of the Federal government? No doubt this was the hint that led to the enterprise that has resulted so disastrously; and within a few days the same threat has been repeated by another leading Virginian with reference to the probable result of the next presidential election. Thus the men who hang John Brown announce their purpose to imitate his conduct. What was treason in him, changes to patriotism in them! Can that conduct, then, stamp him with infamy, even in their eyes?

And if he indulged any idea of a serious and general movement for freedom, as possibly arising from his undertaking, in case of an armed contest, he may have deemed success more probable than we are prepared to pronounce it. He may have over-estimated the readiness of men in the free States to rush to his aid when the conflict should have fully begun, and he may have been deceived as to the readiness of the slaves to co-operate with any party that might promise liberty. His own success previously in Kansas may have blinded him to the difficulties of this new scheme, so that it appeared to him benevolent and feasible in all its aspects.

And then once more—who can tell how much secret faith he may have had in interventions of Providence in his behalf as the deliverer of the oppressed. His mind was just of the cast to imagine this, direct descendant as he was of the Pilgrims, from the old May Flower stock, and kindred to the men who followed Cromwell, "trusting in God and keeping their powder dry." He seems to have had a dash of superstitious fanaticism, strengthened by a misuse of Old Testament ideas and practices, and may easily have supposed that God had raised him up like one of the ancient judges, to deliver his oppressed people. And he knew, moreover, that

in the first outbreak of a great revolution, the earliest movements always partake of a seemingly seditious and illegal character; for the laws never make provision for revolutions, and those who lead in the first overt acts of discontent are usually slaughtered without mercy as mere insurrectionists, after which the smothered coals ignite and the flame of indignation and rebellion kindles into a universal conflagration. Our own revolution was introduced by riotous resistance to the use of stamped paper, the destruction of the tea in Boston harbor, the "Boston massacre" (to the funeral of whose victims the whole city turned out) and the petty skirmishes of Concord and Lexington, no war as yet having been declared.

These considerations, while not justifying John Brown's invasion of Virginia, as an act in itself proper, may easily persuade us that to his own mind it appeared right, so that he was conscientious in undertaking it. We may then view him as a man without holding him severely responsible for this error of judgment. When we judge *him*, in his personal character, we are to remember also that he was a professor of religion, a member of an Old School Presbyterian church, nor has any one a word to offer against the reality and fervency of his piety, aside from his conduct in making armed resistance to slavery. And if officers and privates in the armies of different nations, who make war their profession and place themselves at the disposal of their respective governments to fight battles any where and for any purpose, if in the judgment of our conservative divines and editors, such men may give evidence of genuine piety, and after their death on the battle ground, their biographies may be written and widely circulated by religious publishers, it may be allowed us to believe in the possible piety of John Brown, who though he shed blood, did it not for hire, nor for

glory, but thought that he wielded "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon," for the deliverance of the oppressed. Indeed it is difficult to read the accounts given even by his enemies, respecting his personal purity, dignity, calmness, self-possession, truthfulness, fortitude, and adherence to principle, without believing him to have been in some respects a very eminent Christian, despite his errors. He was characteristically a man of prayer, and like the old Puritans, prayed before he fought, and fought all the harder in the remembrance of his prayer. His courage was evidently the courage of faith, the fear of man being lost in the fear of God; while like all genuine heroes, he proved his greatness by the humanity which tempered his daring. Nobler sentiments have fallen from no man, than were uttered by him in his conversation, in his letters and in his address to the court. What, for instance, can exceed the moral sublimity of the words contained in his letter to his old friend, Rev. H. L. Vaill, "I have enjoyed much of life, as I was enabled to discover the secret of this somewhat early. It has been in making the prosperity and happiness of others my own; so that really I have had a great deal of prosperity. I am very prosperous still." And how lofty the faith of his declaration at the close of one of his letters to his wife, "I cannot remember a night so dark as to have hindered the coming day; nor a storm so furious and dreadful, as to prevent the return of warm sunshine, and a cloudless sky." His whole demeanor, up to the last moment, gave evidence of reverence for God, love to man, and a heart in which was "the peace that passeth understanding." Let his faults have been what they may, John Brown, so far as we can judge him, was a genuine Christian. He did in life what he thought God called him to do, and when he was sentenced to death,



meekly accepted it as an act of Providence and as God's intimation that he "was worth inconceivably more to hang, than for any other purpose." Who that has read the "Prison Meditations," of John Bunyan will not be reminded of the parallel declaration of that immortal dreamer:

"The prison very sweet to me,  
Hath been since I came here;  
*And so would also hanging be*  
If God should there appear."

I would recommend the ministers and editors who rail at John Brown to read this entire work of Bunyan, and explain if they can, the coincidence in the spirit, the sentiments and the language of the two men. Thus, in the very spirit of the text, he signified, that if, as a single grain of wheat, he was useless for food, he would at least answer to plant. We stand too near him and have too much at stake in the great question which he sought to solve, for us to judge him truly. Future generations will do him ample justice; and history will number him among her heroes. Yea, the time may come when Virginia herself will be proud of his monument.

And what will be the eventual result of his deeds and of his death? If partly evil, by man's imperfection, yet largely good, by God's overruling. The error of his judgment will be eclipsed by the glory of his principles; we shall forget his mistaken appeal to arms, and think only of his character, his motives, his sacrifices, and his death. It is not in vain that John Brown has died, in form as a traitor, in spirit as a martyr. Though his deeds came seemingly to nought, his heroic daring, and his sublime contempt of death, even by the hand of the executioner, will render him immortal. They have killed *him*, but they have given new life to his *principles*. It is worthy of notice how strong was John Brown's own faith in such a result. His words in the letter to Rev. Mr. Vail, already referred to, were:

"As I believe most firmly that God reigns, I can not believe that anything I have *done, suffered, or may yet suffer, will be lost to the cause of God or humanity*. And before I began my work at Harper's Ferry, I felt assured that in the *worst event* it would certainly *pay*. I often expressed that belief; and I can now see no possible cause to alter my mind. I am not as yet in the *main*, at all disappointed. I have been a *good deal* disappointed as it regards *myself*, in not keeping up to *my own plans*, but I now feel entirely reconciled to that even; for God's plan was infinitely better, *no doubt*, or I should have kept to my own. Had Sampson kept to his determination not to tell Delilah wherein his great strength lay, he would probably never have overturned the house. I did not tell Delilah, but I was induced to act very *contrary* to my *better judgment*; and I have lost my *two noble boys*, and other friends, if not my *two eyes*."

The thrill which has run through the nation has at least startled it from lethargy and made it conscious that the grand problem of its own continued existence lies unsolved in this very question of slavery. Shame has already crimsoned millions of cheeks, that we have cherished thus long in the world's presence and before the despots of Europe, an institution so vile, as to tempt men like John Brown to sacrifice their lives in vain attempts at its overthrow, and yet so weak withal, that its defenders quake at the sight of their own shadows and it can only be sustained by force of arms and the grim display of the gallows. And must not these events lead to a renewed and more earnest discussion of the subject in church and in state, at the North and at the South? Has not the fact stood revealed, that beneath the South is the volcano of a slave insurrection, the fatal eruption of which may come either from the prompting of hope, or the wild phrenzy of despair? Has not the panic of an entire State at the invasion of a corporal's guard,—a fact not at all ludicrous in its indication of the

fearful liabilities of the South, but only as contrasted with the frequent boasts, the insulting threats and the assumed courage of her politicians—has not this panic, I say, proved the weakness of our country in case of a serious invasion by some powerful foe, as also the horrors which hang over the South in case of a dissolution of the Union resulting in civil war? Must not Christians likewise be led to inquire, whether God is not thus rebuking their unfaithfulness, and warning them that their recreancy may lead to desperate measures on the part of the slaves and their sympathizers? Who does not see in these things an occasion for alarm, lest God, giving us up to our sins, should allow human passion to kindle on both sides, until by mutual acts of mad violence, our country is made the scene of terrible carnage, and slavery is destroyed in a second Red Sea, but this time of blood?

Our hope is in God and in His Church. Let Christians arise and with one voice demand that this sin of oppression shall be put away. Let them use all peaceful and appropriate means to spread light and to bring all classes to concur in emancipation, as equally the right of the slave, the duty of the master, the necessity of the nation, and the command of God. Let them see especially that the church itself is pure from this sin; that the ministry fails not in the proclamation of the truth, and that the membership does not embrace those who claim property in their fellow-men. Then may we hope for national repentance and an escape from divine judgments.

But if all warning be despised, if the Church of the living God will not come to the help of the oppressed, if even ministers of the gospel shall be more concerned to condemn the errors and faults of those who are earnestly seeking the overthrow of slavery, than to expose the enormities of that system of abominations, we may

justly expect that God will work through other and more terrible instrumentalities. For I suppose that none of my hearers is skeptical on the point that American slavery is doomed to destruction. *God will destroy it.* "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He will first offer the work in its more peaceful form to His Church; if the Church despises or neglects it, He will make use of other providential methods, human wrath, war, bloodshed, until He has taught the world a lesson of justice and humanity through us, as He did three thousand years ago through Egypt. The crisis is a solemn one. for God's purposes are ripening fast, and I need not remind you how rapidly His work comes to a close, when "the set time" has arrived. The long period of preparation is drawing to an end, and the vials of wrath are ready to be poured out. Everything betokens a speedy and terrible struggle between liberty and slavery, and what may happen to our beloved country in the conflict no tongue can predict. Now is the time for the people of God to lift up their voices in prayer and to put forth their hands in effort. Now is the time for the ministers of religion to rush in, like Aaron of old, with their burning censers between the living and the dead, that we perish not by divine judgments.—Numb. 16: 46—48. Now is the time for God in His search to find the men to "make up the hedge" and to "stand in the gap" before Him for the land, that He should not destroy it.—Ezek. 22: 29, 30. If such shall be the result of the sacrifice of John Brown, it will appear that he was a seed of liberty divinely planted at this critical period that by "dying" he "might bring forth much fruit."





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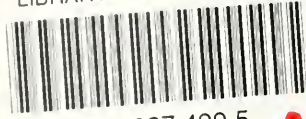


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